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Viewing cable 06KINGSTON542, AMBASSADOR'S MARCH 15 MEETING WITH PRIME

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06KINGSTON542	2006-03-17 20:22	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Kingston

Appears in these articles:

<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20110527/lead/lead1.html>

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR (BENT)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [PINR](#) [JM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MARCH 15 MEETING WITH PRIME
MINISTER-ELECT PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas C. Tighe. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) On March 15, the Ambassador called on a visibly weary Portia Simpson Miller (PSM), at Jamaica House. Minister of Commerce, Science, Technology, and Energy Phillip Paulwell and former Foreign Trade Minister Tony Hylton were also present. In their first formal meeting since the latter's triumph in the February 25 PNP election to determine a successor to outgoing Prime Minister P.J. Patterson, they discussed the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), the importance of education and the success in Jamaica of the President's Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) program. The Ambassador encouraged Simpson Miller to select the best individuals possible for her Cabinet, but was constrained in how candid she could be about our concerns about corruption by the presence of the highly suspect Paulwell. (We are nevertheless confident that the message registered, as Hylton subsequently asked the Canadians, disingenuously in our view, whether the Ambassador was trying to signal concern.) Simpson extended a verbal invitation to the Secretary to attend the March 30 ceremony marking her assumption of the premiership. End Summary.

Meeting the Prime Minister-designate

¶2. (SBU) On March 15, the Ambassador called on a tired-looking Portia Simpson Miller, at Jamaica House. In their first formal meeting since the latter's triumph in the February 25 Peoples National Party (PNP) election to determine a successor to outgoing Prime Minister P.J. Patterson (Ref A), Simpson Miller was joined by Phillip Paulwell, Minister of Commerce, Science, Technology, and Energy, and Ambassador Tony Hylton, a former Minister of Trade; DCM and Pol/EconCouns (notetaker) accompanied the Ambassador.

Interest in MCA and CETT

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador began by reiterating her congratulations on Simpson Miller's victory, and expressed a desire to work closely with the GOJ on issues of mutual concern, including counternarcotics efforts, and cooperating where possible to ensure proper security for the 2007 Cricket World Cup. Noting the budget constraints imposed by U.S. commitments in the Middle East and elsewhere, the Ambassador nevertheless outlined the potential benefits to Jamaica of participation in the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). She also briefly described the Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) Program, having recently visited two participating CETT schools, and encouraged the PM-elect to identify an appropriate member of her team for follow-up on both MCA and CETT. Simpson Miller expressed keen interest in both programs, explaining that she intended to "hit the ground running" upon taking office. On the spot, she directed Paulwell, Hylton, and Rosalee Hammond (whom she described as a policy advisor) to follow up with the Embassy for more information.

Cabinet Selection

¶4. (C) The Ambassador also encouraged Simpson Miller to select the best individuals available to serve in her Cabinet, and noted that her selections were eagerly anticipated - and would be closely watched - domestically and

abroad. As if anticipating the Ambassador's unspecified concerns about Paulwell (and with Paulwell seated next to the Ambassador), Simpson Miller specifically stated that she had not yet decided who would be her Minister of National Security. (Note: Per Ref B, on March 13, the Ambassador and British High Commissioner Jeremy Cresswell met to discuss mutual concerns over the possible inclusion of Paulwell in the new Cabinet, and how best to raise the issue with Simpson

Miller in their respective meetings. Cresswell, who met with Simpson Miller later on March 14, subsequently briefed the Ambassador. Paulwell and Hylton also sat in on that meeting, he said, which similarly limited what he could say with Paulwell present. End note.)

Early Elections?

¶5. (C) Simpson Miller indicated that she would not make wholesale changes until winning a popular mandate in a general election. She implied but did not specifically state that she would call early elections, noting that she did not want "campaigning" to mar the March-April 2007 Cricket World Cup, and that she could not effect a number of Cabinet changes she hoped to make without an electoral mandate. Simpson Miller implied on several occasions that she would like to replace more ministers than was politically expedient, or possible. (Note: Unlike in the U.S. system, where a president can draw Cabinet officers from politics, the private sector, academia, or almost anywhere else, in Jamaica members of Cabinet must be sitting members of the legislature, either as elected MPs or as appointed senators. End note.) Whereas her campaign slogan was "Team Portia", Simpson Miller emphasized that she intends to govern inclusively as "Team Jamaica," and to continue her campaign practice of not answering some critics' vitriolic political attacks in kind. Clearly with an eye on the general elections, she said she planned to spend as much time as her governing responsibilities allowed reaching out to Jamaicans on "street corners and rural areas," and that she would require her ministers to maintain a more visible public presence in the exercise of their portfolios.

Invitation to the Secretary

¶6. (SBU) Noting that the Secretary recently attended presidential inaugurations in Liberia and Chile, Simpson Miller specifically extended a verbal invitation to the Secretary to attend her swearing-in ceremony in Kingston on

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March 30. (Paulwell added that specifics on the ceremony would soon be forthcoming from the Foreign Ministry. As of March 17, however, we have heard nothing further. In response to a call from the DCM, MFA Permanent Secretary said that he, too, was awaiting guidance on the nature and scope of the ceremony.) The Ambassador replied that she would convey word of the invitation to the Department.

A Simpson Miller Rival Awaits His Fate

¶7. (C) Meanwhile, current Minister of National Security Peter Phillips, who lost to Simpson Miller on February 25 and whose campaign had been sharply critical of the eventual victor, requested to meet with a member of the Embassy Country Team on March 16. Apparently wishing to convey a message, he told the officer that he has had no contact with Simpson Miller or her team about whether or not he will be asked to serve in her Cabinet. Phillips was the second-largest vote-getter on February 25, and still commands considerable support and respect within the party. If asked, Phillips continued, he would agree to remain in his current post, or assume either the Finance Ministry or Foreign Affairs/Foreign Trade

portfolio. None of the other ministries interested him, he said, and if none is offered, he will simply become a back-bencher in Parliament.

Comment

¶8. (C) Having sewn up the contest to succeed Patterson, Simpson Miller is now well along in that hectic transitional phase from second-tier minister to the top job. Paulwell's presence at the meeting signaled his importance to Simpson Miller and, potentially, his influence in her government. Unfortunately, it also limited the candor with which the Ambassador could address the corruption issue during the meeting. That said, though her message was couched in terms of the importance of selecting the "best" individuals for Cabinet, we believe that Simpson Miller, Paulwell, and Hylton clearly understood it. Canadian DCM Brian Burton told DCM

March 16 that Hylton had visited his boss, Canadian High Commissioner Claudio Valle, earlier that day to ask Valle whether the U.S. Ambassador and the British High Commissioner had intended to convey a message to Simpson Miller.

According to Burton, Valle, who knows Simpson Miller well from two previous tours in Jamaica and who planned to have a one-on-one conversation with her about corruption concerns, responded frankly to Hylton's inquiry. Valle bluntly confirmed to Hylton that the Canadian, U.S. and U.K. missions are indeed concerned about Paulwell's reputed illicit activities and associations, and by the possibility that he (or others like him who supported Simpson Miller's campaign) could hold sensitive positions, or wield influence, in her government. Burton added that Hylton did not seem surprised by Valle's remarks.

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